

Latest Developments Regarding the Dominican Republic

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I thought you might be interested in the latest developments regarding the Dominican Republic.

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The Dominican Republic is Completely Safe for U.S. Tourists

- After a couple months of media frenzy, it appears that nothing strange is going on in the Dominican Republic.
- "We have not seen an uptick in the number of U.S. citizen deaths reported to the department," a U.S. State Department official told NBC News.
- The U.S. State Department insists that the number of natural deaths in the Dominican Republic this year is normal compared to previous years, and that there are actually less unnatural deaths (car accidents, homicides, suicides,

drownings, etc.) so far this year than there have been in the last few years.

- Dominican Minister of Tourism García says that the media reports of “mysterious” tourist deaths are misleading, explaining that those who have died have had autopsies and have died of natural causes, and that the deaths are unrelated and “isolated” events.
- García assures visitors that the country is safe, stating that the ministry is going “hotel by hotel” to determine the level of existing security and to determine what else needs to be done to guarantee that the best security measures are in place for its guests.
- To help ease tourists’ minds, and to ensure the highest quality of goods and services for its visitors, the Dominican officials are working with the National Hotel Association to reinforce the island’s food and beverage safety standards and ensure quality control in food and beverages, following some implications that individuals have gotten sick after consumption of beverages.
- Dominican authorities have also created new safety measures, like: inspecting hotels more frequently; requiring hotels to post emergency contact information in every room; frequent food, beverage, and hotel inspections; adding additional monitoring and licensing measures to medical facilities in the hotels; immediate access to emergency information for tourism staff and visitors; and opening an emergency tourism center.
- The Dominican Republic’s Minister of Health, Dr. Rafael Sanchez Cardenas stated that the medical reports and autopsies show the recent tourist deaths are not related.
- The Dominican Republic has seen a 7.9% increase in U.S. visitors between 2017 and 2018, yet the number of unnatural deaths has been dropping according to the U.S. State Department (30 in 2015, 18 in 2016, 17 in 2017, and 13 in 2018).
- U.S. State Department and FBI statistics indicate that both Jamaica and the Bahamas have higher rates of unnatural U.S. tourist deaths than the Dominican Republics.
- The proportion of unnatural deaths of U.S. citizens is actually higher in the U.S. than in the Dominican Republic. Thus, U.S. citizens have a greater risk of dying of an unnatural cause in the U.S. than in the Dominican Republic.
- Although the media was quick to hype the panic and create a worldwide rush to judgement, reporters at NBC, ABC, Fox, etc. have all come to the realization after discussions with Dominican authorities, U.S. State Department officials, and FBI officials that this panic has no basis.
- In an article written by *The Hill*, former Foreign Service Officer for the U.S. State Department, Christopher Richardson, stated “the simplest explanation is normally the correct one, and the intensity and baselessness of these stories should be the story itself. The fact is, there are perfectly explainable causes for these deaths — and to suggest more without evidence is a dangerous rush to judgment.” He continues, “These situations were tragic, but they are an inevitable consequence of millions of Americans traveling abroad each year. While the media is breathlessly raising the alarm over the Dominican Republic, in 2018, 14 Americans died in Canada, six in the United Kingdom, and eight in France of unnatural causes and, collectively, probably hundreds died of natural causes. Yet, there is no endless news coverage or reporters sniffing the vodka in pubs in England,”

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Tourism Industry Sees Rapid Growth

- In the first half of 2019 the country saw a 3.9% increase in international tourists, compared to the same period in 2018, bringing in a total of 3,575,298 visitors.
- The Dominican tourism sector has seen more than 40 million visitors and has made \$45 million in revenue in the last seven years.
- In 2018, there were 6.6 million non-resident visitors, making it the number one destination in the Caribbean and the third top destination in Central America and South America.
- In 2018, the country made over \$7,560 million in tourism income, that’s 8.8% of the country’s GDP, while maintaining 85% occupancy, which is well above the rest of the Caribbean and Central American nations.
- In the first half of 2019, the Ministry of Tourism approved 33 new tourism initiatives, about \$2,865 million in investments, adding an additional 14,669 new rooms to the country.
- In the first four months of 2019, the country hosted more than 2.1 million visitors, an increase of nearly 3.7% compared to the same period in 2018, with nearly 40% of the tourists originating from the U.S.
- The Dominican government has taken steps to create sustainable tourism by reducing marine and land-based pollution, decreasing the consumption of materials, and diminishing waste resulting from tourism.

- The Dominican government and the UN Environment Program have developed a new tourism plan that will include ways to reduce food waste, increase energy efficiency, and increase the use of renewable energy in hotels and restaurants.
- The Roadmap for Low Carbon and Resource Efficient Accommodation establishes five targets for the accommodation sector: reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 25% by 2030, reduce food waste by 50%, reduce non-renewable energy use by 25%, completely eliminate single-use plastics, and increase the sustainability certification for hotels.
- The government will also create a regulatory framework with standards and certification schemes to identify energy-efficient products and services, encourage the procurement of that equipment, and implement training and awareness programs in energy management and renewable energy.

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The U.S. Continues Support of the Dominican Republic

- The U.S. government supports President Medina's decision not to seek re-election next year. President Medina believes in the importance of the democratic process and wishes to honor the process by not seeking re-election past the constitutional term limits.
- U.S. Secretary of State Pompeo, says that other world leaders should applaud and look-up-to President Medina's example of political management and respect of a government "by and for the people", stating, "The U.S. supports the Dominican people and their democratic future."
- The exchange of commercial goods between the U.S. and the Dominican Republic increased by 9.4% in 2018 compared to 2017, amounting to nearly \$1,195 million, with an increase of about 10.6% (\$501 million) in exports and about 8.7% (\$693 million) in imports.
- In 2018, trade between the two countries reached \$13,892 million.
- In 2018, the Dominican Republic welcomed 2.23 million American visitors, contributing greatly to the progress, GDP, and socioeconomic development of the country.

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Economy Sees Growth in New Areas

- In the first half of 2019, the country's exports increased 1.7%, exporting \$5,522 million, of which 51% of exports are shipped to the U.S.
- In the first quarter of 2019, the Dominican Republic reported a 6.3% growth in mining exports, compared to the same quarter the previous year, amounting to \$459.3 million in minerals and metals.
- In 2018, it exported \$1,771 million in metals and minerals (primarily gold, nickel, silver and copper), accounting for 18% of national exports.
- Scotiabank applauds the favorable investment climate in the Dominican Republic, building two large customer service centers that will generate nearly 2,000 jobs.
- In the first four months of 2018, avocado exports reached \$30 million, while just eight years ago, they only reached \$11.4 million, an increase of more than 150%.

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Dominican Government Works to Improve Quality of Life

- The National Alliance for the Reduction of Maternal and Child Mortality has been created to develop strategies and plans to reduce the rate of maternal and infant mortality in the Dominican Republic, with a government investment of \$8 million for maternity centers.
- Neonatal mortality rates have dropped 29% and maternal mortality have dropped 7% in the first five months of the 2019, compared to the same months last year, due to government investment in prenatal and labor and delivery infrastructure and equipment, and a new more through training program for hospital staff.
- The Public Health Services Network developed an operational plan to help manage risk factors, and to devise a plan for a timely response of disseminate specialized services and medical care, supplies, medicines, fuel, blood, and healthcare personnel, in the event of disasters and possible epidemic outbreaks.
- At the start of the hurricane season, the Dominican Electricity Transmission Company established a disaster preparedness plan to guarantee security and continuity of power services nationwide in the event of a natural disaster. The plan includes regular inspections, contingency plans, regular maintenance of the electric grid, and supplying essential materials (poles, cables, batteries for inverters, crossbars, insulators, capacitor banks, vehicles, machinery, etc.).

- With the hurricane season starting, the Mayor of Santo Domingo invested \$32 million into improvements in storm drainage as a preventative measure to protective low-lying communities.
- The Santo Domingo Aqueduct and Sewer Corporation is finalizing a project that improves the quality of life of over 800,000 residents, providing quality drinking water and sanitation and wastewater treatment.
- The Dominican military and police forces received 95 motorcycles, four trucks and three drones, as part of a new initiative of President Medina's to strengthen their operations in the fight against common crime and organized crime.
- The Dominican Republic is working on several projects to prepare the country to operate 5G networks and bring about a digital transformation.

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The Dominican Government Furthers Its Bilateral Relations

- Dominican President Medina met with the Moroccan officials to discuss increased cooperation in tourism, renewable energy, and agriculture.
- Dominican FM Vargas met with members of the UN Security Council, where he laid out the Dominican Republic's goals for the council during its presidency, including: joint efforts to ensure greater global well-being and to increase development and security in the region and throughout the world; to have open discussions on environmental degradation and natural disaster preparedness and response; and to discuss world peace and security against organized crime and the illicit proliferation of weapons.
- The Dominican Republic opened a new embassy in Antigua and Barbuda and signed MoUs in political, economic, and academic matters increasing bilateral relations between the two countries and further establishing their intent to work together on issues that affect the entire region

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Dominican Republic Lessens Its Environmental Impact

- A new wind farm has begun operations and will provide 50 MW of renewable energy to 150,000 homes.
- The Dominican government passed a new law (Law 57-07), which establishes a 100% exemption on import taxes on equipment, machinery, and accessories for the production of renewable energy. The import tax incentive also includes equipment used to transform, transmit or connect energy to the National Interconnected Electrical System.
- The government will also be giving an income tax break of up to 40% to homeowners, businesses owners and industries that increase their renewable energy systems.
- The EIB is providing \$5.6 million to the Dominican Republic to support the financing of renewable energy and energy efficient projects for SMEs and medium to low-income families, and will finance education and training related to renewable energy and energy efficiency solutions in schools and universities.

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President Medina Takes on Educational Reform

- Over 19 academic, social, and cultural entities have given public support for the Departmental Order No. 33-2019 approved by the Ministry of Education (MINERD), which creates a plan and implementation for gender equality policy in the Dominican Ministry of Education, helping to eliminate gender inequality, discrimination, and violence by training teachers to instill gender equality values in students.
- MINERD and the Attorney General's Office have devised a road map to help prevent violence, bullying, and sexual assault, which will include community workshops for families, guidance for schools, and training for teachers and educational staff.
- As part of President Medina's Educational Revolution, the Ministry of Education is preparing the National Teacher Certification Program to certify around 10,000 teachers by 2020 and help increase the quality of teachers in the country.
- The Minister of Education just provided more than \$16 million in funds to the decentralized boards of educational centers and technical-labor schools, which will be used to buy teaching materials and to improve the conditions and infrastructure of schools and services.
- MINERD's One to One Project of the Digital Republic Education Program delivered 25,000 computers to teachers nationwide as a part of President Medina's Educational Revolution, which is focused on enhancing information and

8/7/2019

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communication technology in Dominican schools, and includes an extensive training program for teachers and increases STEM based education in schools.

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